

Message Text

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PAGE 01 HELSIN 00598 251653Z
ACTION EUR-12

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UNCLAS HELSINKI 0598

EO 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, FI
SUBJECT: FINNISH STRIKES HIT HOME

REF: (A) HELSINKI 0393, (B) HELSINKI 0218

1. FOLLOWING WEEKS OF INTERMITTENT BARGAINING AND LARGELY INEFFECTIVE WORK STOPPAGES IN INDUSTRIAL SECTOR, FINNISH LABOR MARKET SITUATION HAS TAKEN TURN TOWARD THE CHAOTIC WITH COMMENCEMENT OF SERIOUS STRIKES IN KEY AREAS OF SERVICE SECTOR. AIRLINE TECHNICIANS' STRIKE MARCH 18 AND 19 GROUNDED FINNAIR, TOTALLY SHUTTING DOWN DOMESTIC AIR SERVICE. SELECTIVE WORK STOPPAGES BY ELECTRICAL POWER PLANT TECHNICIANS BEGINNING MARCH 24 HAVE CUT ELECTRIC POWER PRODUCTION 40 PERCENT, LEFT SEVERAL CITIES ACROSS FINLAND IN DARK FOR LONG PERIODS, AND THREATEN MAJOR INDUSTRIAL SHUTDOWN. ICEBREAKER CREW STRIKE HAS BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL MARCH 31, BUT NOW SEEMS LIKELY TO TAKE PLACE ON THAT DATE, AND ITS EFFECT COULD BE AGGRAVATED BY THREATENED STRIKE BY SEAMEN'S UNION AGAINST INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING BEGINNING APRIL 7. COMMERCIAL EMPLOYEES, WHO STAGED SPOT STRIKES MARCH 19, THREATEN NATIONWIDE WALKOUT APRIL 7, WHICH UNCLASSIFIED

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WOULD CLOSE DOWN MOST RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS.

2. THAT LABOR UNREST STEMMING FROM COLLECTIVE BARGAINING IMPASSE IS ONLY NOW HITTING HOME IS DUE TO PARTIAL SUCCESS OF LIINANAA PROPOSALS (REF A) WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY BULK OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNIONS, SCHEDULED TO SIGN CONTRACTS MARCH 26, AND SOME PRIVATE SECTOR WHITE COLLAR WORKERS.

HOWEVER, MOMENTUM OF THESE RAPID AGREEMENTS HAS PROBABLY BEEN LOST WITH REJECTION OF PROPOSALS BY COMMERCIAL WORKERS AND FAILURE OF INDUSTRIAL UNIONS TO REACH TERMS.

3. DOMINANT METAL WORKERS' UNION, WHICH CARRIED OUT TWO-DAY STRIKE EARLY IN MARCH (REF B) DECIDED MARCH 23 THAT LIINAMAA PROPOSALS ARE UNSATISFACTORY, ALTHOUGH IT WILL CONTINUE NEGOTIATIONS BASED ON EMPLOYERS' OFFER. DECISION WAS UNANIMOUS, INCLUDING UNION'S COMMUNIST MINORITY IN UNUSUAL SHOW OF UNITY. REST OF INDUSTRIAL UNIONS LOOK TO METAL WORKERS FOR LEAD IN BARGAINING AND ALTHOUGH FINNISH EMPLOYERS' CONFEDERATION HAS RELUCTANTLY ACCEPTED LIINAMAA PROPOSALS, IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT AGREEMENT IS NEAR IN INDUSTRIAL SECTOR. EFFECTIVENESS OF NEW STRIKE ACTION BY TECHNICAL AND SERVICE WORKERS, DESPITE ITS GENERAL UNPOPULARITY, MAY ENCOURAGE GREATER RESISTANCE TO SETTLEMENTS ON LIINAMAA LINES WITH RESULTING PROLONGATION OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY.
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